

Message Text

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12
ACTION EB-07

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FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2272

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: EAIR, BM
SUBJ: AIRPORT SECURITY IN RANGOON

REF: STATE 212490

1. EMBOFF SPOKE TO MFA ABOUT POINTS RAISED IN PARAGRAPH 2 OF REFTTEL. BURMA IS A SIGNATORY OF THE MONTREAL CONVENTION AND A MEMBER OF ICAO. EMBASSY BELIEVES THAT BURMA HAS NOT SIGNED THE HAGUE AGREEMENT.

2. MFA FELT THAT SECURITY AT RANGOON'S MINGALADON AIRPORT IS QUITE STRICT AND NOTED THAT EVEN GUB EMPLOYEES HAVE TROUBLE ENTERING AND EXITING. SOURCE WAS UNAWARE OF ANY PROPOSED RELAXATION OF SECURITY MEASURES AFTER END OF MARTIAL LAW IN RANGOON.

3. EMBOFF MADE ON-SITE INSPECTION AT MINGALADON. SECURITY APPEARED QUITE STRICT ON INTERNATIONAL SIDE OF THE TERMINAL, LESS SO ON DOMESTIC SIDE. BURMESE MAY NOT ENTER INTERNATIONAL DEPARTURE AREA WITHOUT EXIT DOCUMENTS AND ARE SUBJECT TO LENGTHY PERSONAL BAGGAGE SEARCHES. DOORS ARE GUARDED BY UNIFORMED ARMY TROOPERS WITH LOADED AUTOMATIC WEAPONS. DOMESTIC SIDE HAS AHPONSTANT FLOW OF PORTERS AND WELL-WISHERS AND IS LESS CLOSELY GUARDED.

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THE FEW TRANSIT PASSENGERS AT RANGOON DO STAY IN THE

DEPARTURE LOUNGS, SINCE THERE ARE NO SEPARATE TRANSIT FACILITIES. DOMESTIC AND INTERNATIONAL PASSENGERS MAY NOT MINGLE, BUT A DETERMINED TERRORIST COULD WALK ACROSS THE TARMAC TO THE INTERNATIONAL SIDE AFTER PASSING DOMESTIC SECURITY CONTROLS.

4. THESE PRECAUTIONS ARE SOMETIMES ERRATICALLY APPLIED, HOWEVER, BURMESE CAN AVOID SEARCHES AND ENTRY CONTROLS THROUGH BRIBERY OR FAMILY CONNECTIONS. FOREIGNERS ARE SELDOM SEARCHED OR STOPPED FROM ENTERING ANY PART OF THE TERMINAL, ALTHOUGH BAGGAGE CHECKS FOR FOREIGNERS

ARE USUALLY THOROUGH ON THE INTERNATIONAL SIDE. SECURITY PRECAUTIONS SEEMED AIMED MORE AT DETERRING ATTACKS BY DOMESTIC INSURGENTS THAN AT INTERNATIONAL TERRORISTS. PASSENGER AND LUGGAGE SEARCHES SEEM AIMED MORE AT CONTROLLING SMUGGLING THAN DISCOVERING ARMS AND EXPLOSIVES.

5. GUB HAS REQUESTED TENDERS FROM FIVE FIRMS FOR ARMS AND METAL DETECTION UNITS. CURRENTLY, ONLY BRITISH AIRWAYS USES THESE DEVICES FOR PRE-FLIGHT INSPECTIONS. THESE UNITS, IF USED, WOULD IMPROVE SECURITY.

6. BURMESE AIRPORTS OUTSIDE OF RANGOON HAVE LESS STRICT SECURITY CONTROLS DIRECTED PRIMARILY AGAINST DOMESTIC INSURGENTS; IN ANY CASE, MINGALADON IS BURMA'S ONLY INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT.

7. WE BELIEVE THE PROBABILITY OF A HIJACKING AT RANGOON BY INTERNATIONAL TERRORISTS IS NOT VERY HIGH, BOTH BECAUSE OF THE COMPARATIVELY GOOD SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS AND BECAUSE OF THE LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE: WITH THE PLANNED TERMINATION OF BRITISH AIRWAYS SERVICE TO RANGOON NOVEMBER 2, OTHER THAN BURMA AIRWAYS THE ONLY CARRIERS SERVING RANGOON WILL BE THAI INTERNATIONAL, KLM, AND CAC EACH WITH ONE FLIGHT PER WEEK, AND AEROFLOT WITH TWO FLIGHTS PER WEEK. BURMA AIRWAYS HAS DAILY INTERNATIONAL FLIGHTS, BUT WITH THE IMPENDING SALE OF ITS LONE 727, IT WILL NOT HAVE ANY LARGE AIRCRAFT CAPABLE OF THE LONG-RANGE FLIGHTS NORMALLY LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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REQUIRED BY INTERNATIONAL TERRORIST GROUPS. A HIJACKING BY DOMESTIC INSURGENTS, EITHER AT RANGOON OR ELSEWHERE IN BURMA, MAY BE A SOMEWHAT GREATER THREAT, BUT THESE GROUPS HAVE NOT ATTEMPTED HIJACKING IN THE PAST.
OSBORN

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